

Pakistan - Language, Culture, Customs and Business Etiquette

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/pakistan.html>

Language in Pakistan

Urdu is the only official language of Pakistan. Although English is generally used instead of Urdu in this regard. English is the lingua franca of the Pakistani elite and most of the government ministries. Urdu is closely related to Hindi but is written in an extended Arabic alphabet rather than in Devanagari. Urdu also has more loans from Arabic and Persian than Hindi has. Many other languages are spoken in Pakistan, including Punjabi, Siraiki, Sindhi, Pashtu, Balochi, Hindko, Brahui, Burushaski, Balti, Khawar, Gujrati and other languages with smaller numbers of speakers.

Pakistani Society & Culture

Islam

- . Islam is practiced by the majority of Pakistanis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives.
- . Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening.
- . Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed.
- . During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing.

The Family

- . The extended family is the basis of the social structure and individual identity.
- . It includes the nuclear family, immediate relatives, distant relatives, tribe members, friends, and neighbors.
- . Loyalty to the family comes before other social relationships, even business.
- . Nepotism is viewed positively, since it guarantees hiring people who can be trusted, which is crucial in a country where working with people one knows and trusts is of primary importance.
- . The family is more private than in many other cultures.
- . Female relatives are protected from outside influences. It is considered inappropriate to ask questions about a Pakistani's wife or other female relatives.
- . Families are quite large by western standards, often having up to 6 children.

Hierarchical Society

- . Pakistan is a hierarchical society.
- . People are respected because of their age and position.
- . Older people are viewed as wise and are granted respect. In a social situation, they are served first and their drinks may be poured for them. Elders are introduced first, are provided with the choicest cuts of meat, and in general are treated much like royalty.
- . Pakistanis expect the most senior person, by age or position, to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group.
- . Titles are very important and denote respect. It is expected that you will use a person's title and their surname until invited to use their first name.

Meeting and Greeting

- . Greetings are therefore often between members of the same sex; however, when dealing with people in the middle class, greetings may be across sex lines.
- . Men shake hands with each other. Once a relationship is developed, they may hug as well as shake hands.
- . Women generally hug and kiss. Pakistanis take their time during greetings and ask about the person's health, family, and business success.
- . Pakistani names often include a name that denotes a person's class, tribe, occupation, or other status indicator.
- . They may also include two names that have a specific meaning when used together, and the meaning is lost if the names are separated. . It is best to ask a person how they wish to be addressed.
- . In general, this is not a culture where first names are commonly used, except among close friends.

Gift Giving Etiquette

- . If invited to a Pakistani's home, bring the hostess a small gift such as flowers or good quality chocolates.
- . Men should avoid giving flowers to women.
- . Do not give white flowers as they are used at weddings.
- . If a man must give a gift to a woman, he should say that it is from his wife, mother, sister, or some other female relative.
- . Do not give alcohol.
- . Gifts are not opened when received.
- . Gifts are given with two hands.

Dining Etiquette

- . If invited to a home you will most likely have to remove your shoes. Check to see if the host is wearing shoes. If not, remove yours at the door.
- . Dress conservatively.
- . Arrive approximately 15 minutes later than the stipulated time when invited to dinner or a small gathering.
- . You may arrive up to one hour later than the stipulated time when invited to a party.

- . Show respect for the elders by greeting them first.
- . In more rural areas, it is still common to eat meals from a knee-high round table while sitting on the floor.
- . Many people in urban areas do not use eating utensils, although more westernized families do.
- . When in doubt, watch what others are doing and emulate their behavior.
- . Guests are served first. Then the oldest, continuing in some rough approximation of age order until the youngest is served.
- . Do not start eating until the oldest person at the table begins.
- . You will be urged to take second and even third helpings. Saying "I'm full" will be taken as a polite gesture and not accepted at face value.
- . Eat only with the right hand.

Building Relationships & Communication

- . Third-party introductions are a necessity in this relationship-driven culture.
- . Pakistanis prefer to work with people they know and trust and will spend a great deal of time on the getting-to-know-you part of relationship building.
- . You must not appear frustrated by what may appear to be purely social conversation. Pakistanis are hospitable and enjoy hosting foreign guests.
- . Relationships take time to grow and must be nurtured. This may require several visits.
- . Pakistanis often ask personal questions as a way to get to know you as a person. If possible, it is best to answer these questions.
- . Pakistanis do not require as much personal space as most western cultures. As such, they will stand close to you while conversing and you may feel as if your personal space has been violated. Do not back away.
- . Pakistanis are generally indirect communicators.
- . Always demonstrate deference to the most senior person in the group.
- . In general, Pakistanis speak in a roundabout or circuitous fashion. Direct statements are made only to those with whom they have a long-standing personal relationship.
- . They also use a great deal of hyperbole and similes, and go out of their way to find something to praise.
- . Be prepared to flatter and be flattered.
- . Pakistanis prefer to converse in a non-controversial manner, so they will say they "will try" rather than admit that they cannot or will not be able to do something.
- . Therefore, it is important to ask questions in several ways so you can be certain what was meant by a vague response. Silence is often used as a communication tool.
- . Pakistanis prefer to do business in person. They see the telephone as too impersonal a medium for business communication.

Business Meeting Etiquette

- . Appointments are necessary and should be made, in writing, 3 to 4 weeks in advance, although meetings with private companies can often be arranged with less notice.
- . The best time to schedule meetings is in the late morning or early afternoon.
- . If at all possible, try not to schedule meetings during Ramadan. The workday is shortened, and since Muslims fast, they could not offer you tea, which is a sign of hospitality.
- . You should arrive at meetings on time and be prepared to be kept waiting.
- . Pakistanis in the private sector who are accustomed to working with international companies often strive for punctuality, but are not always successful.
- . It is not uncommon to have a meeting cancelled at the last minute or even once you have arrived.
- . In general, Pakistanis have an open-door policy, even when they are in a meeting. This means there may be frequent interruptions. Other people may wander into the room and start a different discussion.
- . Meetings are formal.
- . Business meetings start after prolonged inquiries about health, family, etc.
- . Never inquire about a colleague's wife or daughters.
- . During the first several meetings, business may not be discussed at all as the relationship is still being developed.
- . Maintain indirect eye contact while speaking.

Negotiating

- . Companies are hierarchical. Decisions are made by the highest-ranking person.
- . Decisions are reached slowly. If you try to rush things, you will give offense and jeopardize your business relationship.
- . The society is extremely bureaucratic. Most decisions require several layers of approval.
- . It often takes several visits to accomplish simple tasks.
- . If you change negotiators, negotiations will have to start over since relationships are to the person and not the company that they represent.
- . Pakistanis are highly skilled negotiators.
- . Price is often a determining factor in closing a deal.
- . Pakistanis strive for win-win outcomes.
- . Maintain indirect eye contact while speaking.
- . Do not use high-pressure tactics.
- . Pakistanis can become highly emotional during negotiations. Discussions may become heated and even revert to Urdu (the national language). It is imperative that you remain calm.

Business Card Etiquette

- . Business cards are exchanged after the initial introduction.
- . Include any advanced university degrees or professional honors on your card, as they denote status.
- . Business cards are exchanged using the right hand only or with two hands.
- . Make a point of studying any business card you receive before putting into your business card holder.